

Student finds school lives up to top reputation

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

HORNELL — Jeff Brown knew he was getting into an exceptionally high-quality — and difficult — program when he enrolled at St. James Mercy School of Nursing in 1991.

"I had talked to a few people who had gone there, and I knew I'd best be prepared to work if I went there," said the 34-year-old Brown, a native of nearby Canisteo.

The nursing school's commitment to high standards has gained St. James Mercy some major national recognition. Celebrating its 80th anniversary at the 102-year-old St. James Mercy Hospital, the school recently ranked No. 1 in the United States in a survey by the National Council Licensure examiners.

By finishing at the top of the survey, St. James Mercy, 411 Canisteo St., placed ahead of more than 1,000 registered nursing programs across the country.

Loretta Haeefe, who has served as the nursing school's director for 21 years, likened the program's success to that of a symphony orchestra.

"You have to have the right faculty and students. The faculty is the conductor, the students are the players, and the curriculum is what you play," Haeefe said.

"I felt the (No. 1 ranking) was really nice. It's because I do have an excellent faculty," she added.

More than 900 people have successfully completed St. James Mercy's nursing program over the last eight decades, and 98 percent of the graduates passed the State Board Licensure Examination.

Haeefe observed that the program's long history has created "somewhat of a family. We've had daughters, granddaughters, and nieces of other students" complete the program.

St. James Mercy accredited nine students at this year's graduation ceremony in February. All graduates have moved into nursing positions, mostly at the Catholic hospital in Hornell or

'You get an awful lot of clinical experience. We get a lot of hours on the floor, which is great. This is going to be our bread-and-butter later on.'

Jeff Brown

other hospitals within a 50-mile radius, according to Haeefe.

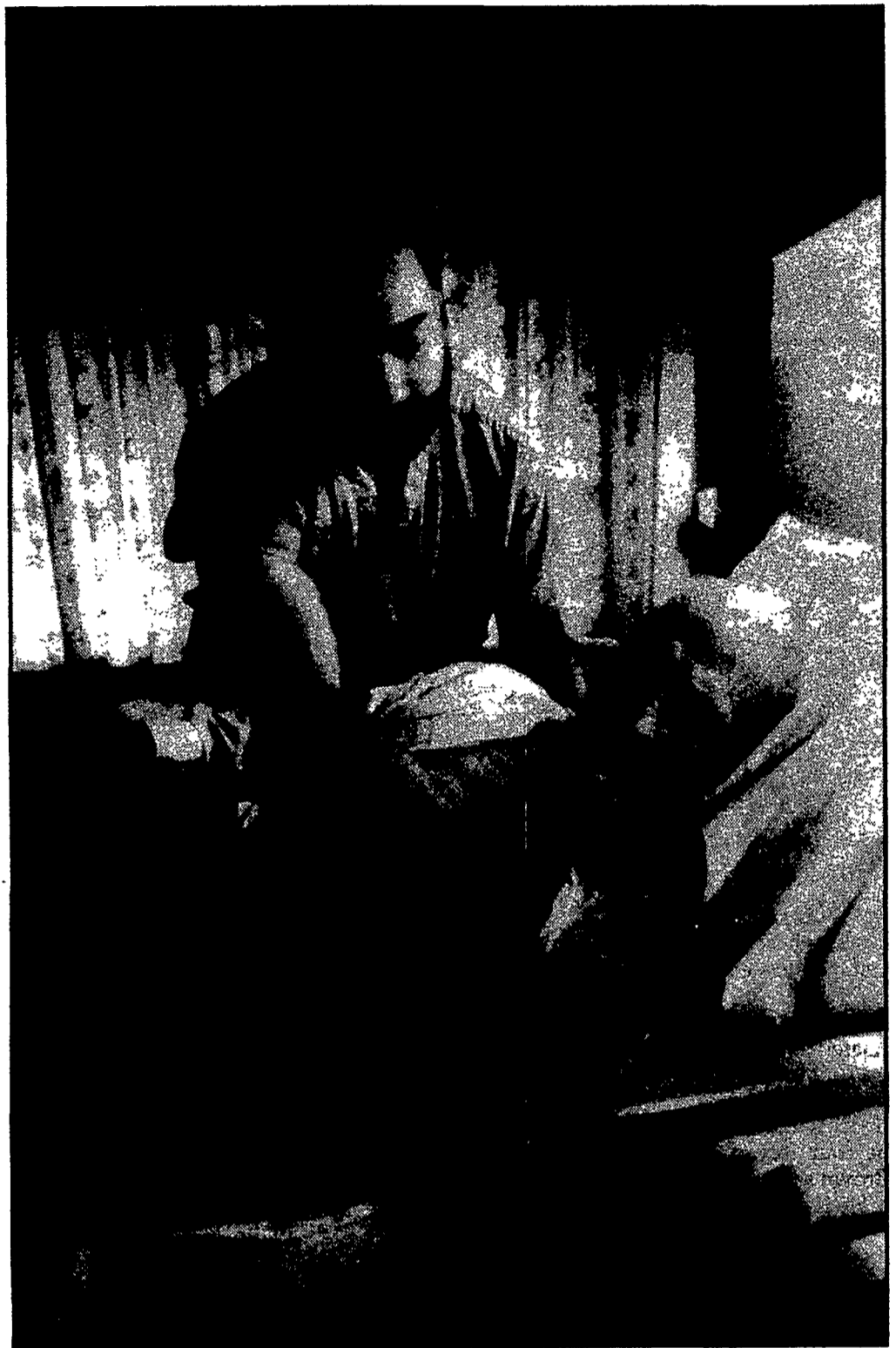
In addition, this year's graduating class achieved the highest total scores nationally on the National Council Licensure Exam.

Total nursing school enrollment normally ranges between 30 and 35 for full-time students, Haeefe said. Most students are Southern Tier residents who commute from their homes.

Because the hospital offers a comparatively modest 135 beds, the school's enrollment figures never get very high.

"We're just a small school. The amount of students you can accept depends on how many beds a hospital has," Haeefe noted.

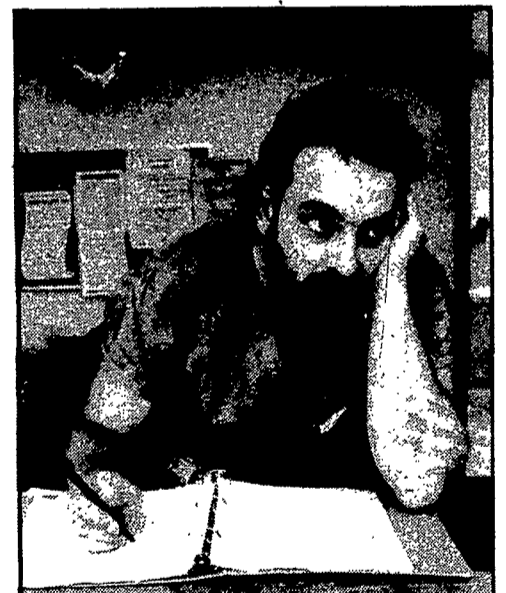
The St. James Mercy program runs five semesters for registered nurses; three semesters for licensed practical nurses. Brown and his girlfriend, Lynn Skinner, are both entering the third leg of the five-semester requirement.



Jeff Brown, a student at the St. James Mercy School of Nursing in Hornell, helps Ray Tierney get dressed. Brown is gaining clinical experience working as a nurse's aide at Mercycare.



Brown's duties include feeding and monitoring Mercycare residents during his eight-hour shift, which begins at 7 a.m. Mercycare is a residential division of St. James Mercy Hospital, providing psychiatric, alcoholic rehabilitation and adult day-care services.



An exhausted Brown works on log entries, indicating his patients' food intake, bodily functions and general demeanor.

Photos
by
Babette G. Augustin